

PAT PORTER

Tall, angular, lanky, lean, long-legged Pat Porter has his head screwed on so tight, you can almost hear the squeak. His is a personality of production, not prattle. He doesn't back up his words with deeds—he lets his actions speak for themselves.

Porter's performances have been screamers, roaring with a determination born of thousands of miles in the oxygen-scarce atmosphere of Alamosa, Colorado. A town of 8-10,000 people ("if you count all the surrounding farms"), Alamosa is the site of Porter's alma mater, Adams State, and his coach, Dr. Joe Vigil. It is a great town in which to grow up; a good place to be grown up.

Much of Pat Porter's growth is ascribed, by Porter himself, to Vigil. In a marvelous love-love relationship, Vigil credits his young charge with being "an extremely hard worker." It's the partnership union that works.

Porter seems to be involved in many partnerships. There's his relationship with his home, his coach and his school—he still lives near campus and trains with the ASC track team. Porter is more than pleased with his partnership with Athletics West, the Nike-sponsored track squad which provides Porter with the wherewithal to chase some of those goals which weren't even dreams for a high school boy who was not even offered an athletic scholarship.

Porter's best partnership seems to be the one we all have, to varying degrees, and with different levels of success; his best partnership just might be the one he has with himself.

T&FN: Funny, you don't look African!

Porter (chuckles): Well, after running the race I did at Worlds, I don't feel very African. I'm not very happy. In fact, I'm rather disappointed.

T&FN: Disappointed? Come on, 6th in the world ain't bad. And let's face it. Those guys who beat you are something special.

Porter: Sure, they are special. What I'm disappointed about is not where I placed, but how and why I finished where I did. I didn't run my own race; I didn't go out when I should have. I ran with inhibitions. You can't win running someone else's race. The Africans bleed like everybody else; they put their pants on like everybody else. They're just guys... very talented, but just guys.

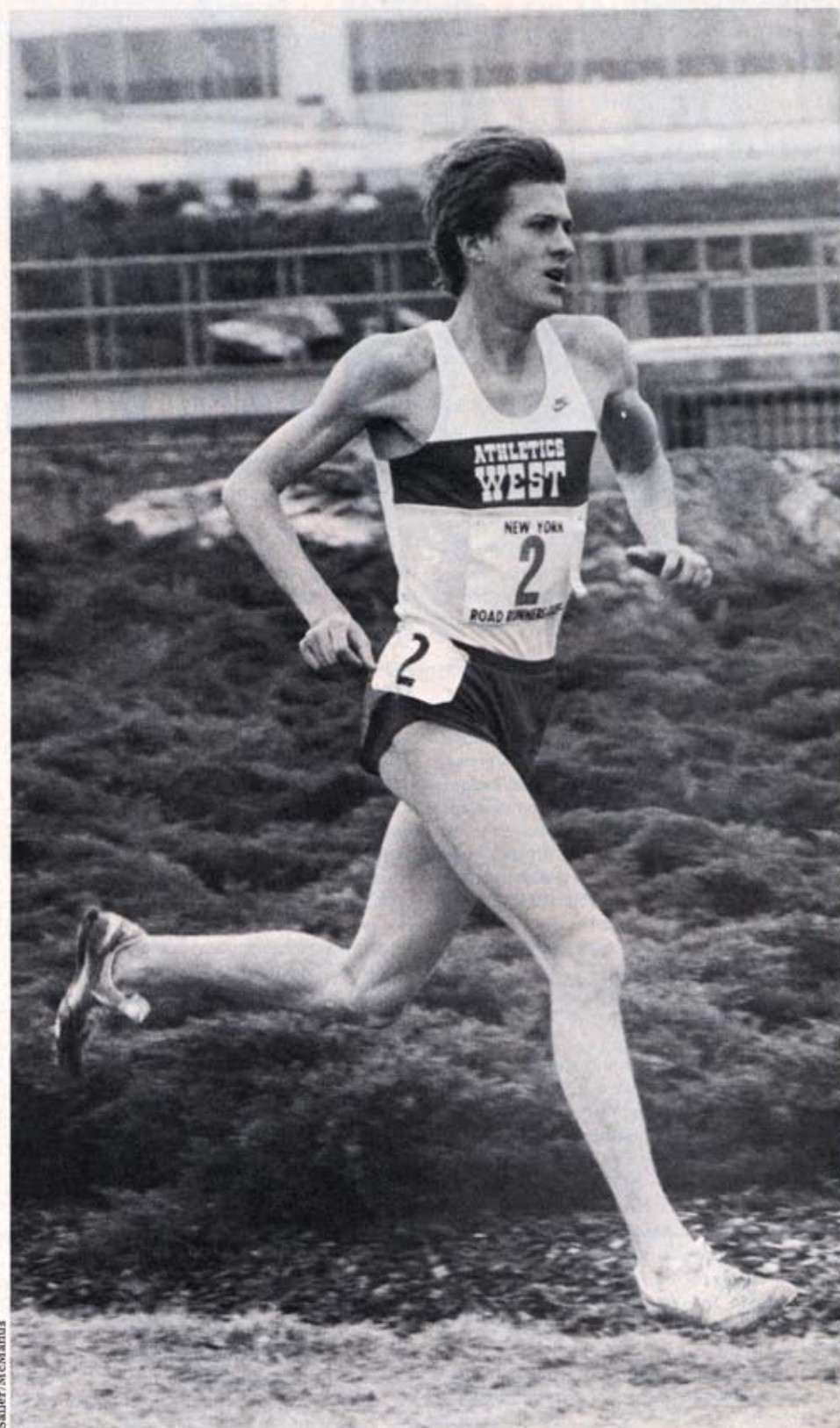
T&FN: You're no slouch yourself.

Porter: Thanks.

T&FN: Let's change the subject before this starts sounding like Johnny Carson interviewing Fernando Lamas. What's it like not to work for a living?

Porter: I don't know. It's a lot of work—hard work.

T&FN: What's hard work?



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Porter: I do a lot of miles, lots of aerobic work. Mountain training.

T&FN: *Can you be more specific?*

Porter: Sure. No secrets here. When I'm racing, I'll do 80-90 miles a week, fairly intense. Normal training mileage is about 100. When I'm building my base, I'll run around 120, but not much quality. At 120, I start to squeak a little bit.

T&FN: *Is that the most you've done?*

Porter: No. I had a really poor season last year. Coming back from a broken foot, I needed the base work. So I did 130 miles for five weeks. I was just putting in the time, and my joints really started making a racket.

T&FN: *I'm still waiting to hear the secret.*

Porter: My long runs are 20 miles or two hours, whichever comes first. Pablo Vigil took me on my first 20-miler; I'd go two hours and not a second longer. I'd plan the route so we'd be near my house when the time was up.

The "secret" is just hard work. That's the secret with most things. I remember when I first started running 100 miles, I thought I would die. When I cut back from 120-130, a 100 seems now like a holiday. It's a lot of hard work and determination.

T&FN: *Have you always wanted to run?*

Porter: Oh no. Like most kids, I think I wanted to play the big-time team sports, but that never worked out. I do remember that my first hero was Jim Ryun. And that was before I started running. I must have been 8 or 9. Ryun was so good and he seemed always to be in the newspapers, winning races and setting records. And he was more than an athlete; he was a good Christian, a good person.

T&FN: *I've heard that you didn't exactly throw yourself at the sport.*

Porter: My sophomore year in high school I went out for track. I figured I'd be a hurdler or something, but when we had tryouts, I was just so petrified. I hung out at the back of the crowd, hoping I wouldn't get noticed. The coach would call out an event and some guys would head out onto the track. Finally, there was one event left—the mile—and four guys.

T&FN: *How'd you do?*

Porter: Well, this isn't one of those wonderful stories where the kid shows up in cutoffs and becomes the star. Let's just say I finished in the top four in my first race.

T&FN: *How did you get so good after starting so poorly?*

Porter: I don't really think I've done anything outstanding yet. If I was truly talented, I'd be winning more, setting records.

T&FN: *Your collegiate career didn't start any better than your prep one, did it?*

Porter: It was different in that by

college at least I was trying. I transferred to Adams State in my soph year and walked on. I can still remember my first long-term run.

It was an "Indian run," one where each runner takes turns in the lead every few minutes. It was six miles and I think I made it to the front twice. When we got finished, I knew the coach would give me a ride back to school—of course, he didn't. By the time I got back, I was exhausted and everybody was either done showering or already gone to dinner.

I'll never forget that day. I was the last man on the team.

T&FN: *Pat, my editors sent some questions so I'd better ask at least some of them. Is it true you wear underwear with the days of the week embroidered on it? Oops, wrong interview!*

Here it is: why is Pat Porter such a tough cross country runner?

Porter: Because he wants to be.

T&FN: *Their questions are designed to bring out illustrative responses. Let's try another: what is it about running that brings out the best in you?*

Porter: That's a toughie. Do you think it does? Hmm. It does drive my desire to excel. It may bring out the worst in me, actually. I get awfully hard to get along with; feisty, even nasty.

T&FN: *That sounds selfish.*

Porter: It is selfish. This is a selfish sport, and that's the nature of the beast.

T&FN: *Can you estimate the effect of Joe Vigil on your career and your life?*

Porter: Coach has had a tremendous effect. I was a typical high school kid and Coach gave me direction. School is absolutely the first priority. Coach taught me about life by stressing so much more than just running. He teaches you to apply the discipline of running to the rest of your life.

T&FN: *Vigil has said you're a runner for all seasons, but isn't cross country your favorite?*

Porter: It's just fun. Track is necessary. Cross country is marginally my favorite, but right now I'm tired of it. October through March is a lot of cross country. Right now, I'm looking forward to track. But cross country—well, the leaves are changing, the weather is brisk... I love it.

T&FN: *How important has it been for you to live and train at altitude for all of your career?*

Porter: It's pretty important. Just knowing me and coach Vigil, I could run well anywhere, but I'm glad I'm at altitude. It makes running everywhere else feel easier. That's the bottom line. I run a 2M time trial in 8:30 up there and it's real tough. It can't be physically good for your body, but altitude is stress and one gets

stronger by adapting to stress.

T&FN: *Has it been tougher for you to get to the top or to stay there? Or is each it's own challenge?*

Porter: Each is different. Neither is easy. I guess it's a little tougher to stay on top. When you're coming up, it's tough learning how to train. At the top, you have to learn how to race, learn the tactics that will help you win. Being on top is harder because there is no margin for error. If you're trying to stay on top and you're not fit, you're in big trouble.

T&FN: *In a different vein, you must be pretty well known in Alamosa. What's it like to be 26 years old and the most famous guy in town?*

Porter: I've never thought of myself as famous because it's been such a gradual process. Yeah, everybody seems to know what's going on and that's strange because I've never told anyone about myself.

Alamosa is pretty slow, but I like it. You can really get into your own life. Everybody seems to know me, but that's okay. When I made the Olympic Team, there were congratulatory signs up all over. I do get a lot of recognition, but my success gives Alamosa a lot of that same notoriety.

T&FN: *Any idea how much longer you will compete?*

Porter: My plan is to be very much like Carlos Lopes. Look at his record: 1972 through '84; three world titles; 27:17 on the track; a 10K silver medal in '76, marathon gold in '84.

I'm not the best in the world now, but I might be the best someday—if I keep working. I mean, I'm not thinking about the marathon at all. But if I did run one, I know I would run very well.

I keep thinking that in 1996 I'll be 37 years old. The bottom line is mental; it's just how badly you want it. Of course, you have to avoid injury. You have to be lucky. But I don't doubt that the fitter you are, the luckier you'll be. □

Patrick Ralph Porter was born May 31, 1959, in Wadena, Minnesota, and is 6-0/135. Graduated from Evergreen High School in Denver ('77) where he was a 9:40 2-miler and attended Metropolitan State before transferring to Adams State where he graduated ('82). A four-time TAC cross country champion ('82-'85), he was the sole U.S. finalist in the '84 Olympic 10,000 (15th).

Finishes in major 10,000s: 6) '82 TAC; 5) '83 TAC; 3) '84 OT; 3) '85 TAC; 2) '85 World Cup. His PRs: 5000—13:34.98 '85; 10,000—27:49.5 '84. His progression, including places in the U.S. Rankings and on the U.S. List, and finishes in the IAAF Cross Country Championships:

Year	Age	Affiliation	10,000	AR,AL	CC
1982	22/23	Adams State	28:26.27	9, 14	64
1983	23/24	Athletics West	28:04.31	6, 5	9
1984	24/25	"	27:49.5	5, 7	4
1985	25/26	"	28:12.46	4, 6	12
1986	26/27	"			6